
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	233-235 Massachusetts Avenue, NE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	October 27, 2011	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	11-515	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Building owner The Prevention of Blindness Society, with drawings prepared by Paul Levine, AIA, of INTEC, requests concept approval for façade alterations and rear additions to 233-235 Massachusetts Avenue, NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

The applicants have engaged EHT Tracerics, Inc. to document the history of both buildings, through archival research and onsite study, as part of planning for the renovation project. The completed report on their finding shows that the buildings were constructed c.1869-1871 as two frame buildings with basements. 235 features a low-profile, side gable roof set back from the façade by several feet, while 233 features a wholly flat roof.

With the exception of the front rooms of 233 and 235, most of the structural elements are of more recent vintage. The facades, interior finishes, interior stair structures, and rear portions of the buildings were altered during a major renovation in 1957, followed by further overhaul of the façades in 1997. Though constructed as two separate structures, the buildings were joined internally in the 1960s when the party wall was substantially demolished.

Although the structures were originally built as residences, the 200 and 300 blocks of Massachusetts Avenue, NE are now overwhelmingly commercial, including a number of rowhouses converted to restaurant or office use and some newer construction along the corridor. The 200 block includes a rear alley that provides parking and delivery access to the buildings along this row.

Proposal

The new owners plan to renovate the buildings for office use and possible commercial tenant space. Façade work will include replacing existing hardiplank siding with wood siding; replacement of non-original windows and doors and related trim; installation of wood shutters, rehabilitation of the non-original projecting storefronts; and minor alterations to the continuous cornice to more clearly differentiate the original separation of the buildings into two structures.

The more extensive work will occur at the rear of the buildings, where non-original portions of the structures will be removed and replaced with new rear additions. As documented in the applicants' submission materials, a "Preservation Zone" consisting of the front rooms of each building has been designated in order to retain original floor assemblies, roof structures, and wall framing. The new rear additions that will replace the existing rear portions of the building will enclose the adjoining doglegs that current exist between the two buildings and also extend the depth of the buildings. The additions will slightly step up in height from the existing rear walls of the original rooms, though this minor change will not be visible from the street given the height of the buildings and the side gable roof screening this change at 235.

Evaluation

The applicants have carefully documented the extensive changes to the building over time, and the HPO has conducted an onsite evaluation following the removal of some interior drywall to expose structural members. The extensive alterations made to both buildings over time were evident, as were the limited original portions of the structures. The plan to retain existing original fabric and to replace non-original structural elements is consistent with purposes of the preservation act.

The new rear additions are compatible with the character of the buildings and the historic district in their massing, materials, fenestration, and overall design. Although the new rear additions will extend deeper into the lot than the existing footprint, the new depth is consistent with that of other commercial properties along the row and will be shallower than an addition recently approved by the Board to the buildings immediately to the west.

The façade alterations proposed are compatible with the character of the buildings and will reinstate a number of historical features on these much-altered elevations. The applicants should consult with the HPO as construction drawings are prepared in hopes of also improving the condition of the public space, which is currently paved in large part. The reintroduction of green space at the front of the property and careful attention to signage will allow this commendable façade restoration to contribute even more to the streetscape.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff.